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ABSTRACT

This report summarizes the outcomes of a National Task Force on Educational Interpreting that was established to examine and clarify roles and responsibilities, training and certification, working conditions, and other issues and needs concerning the involvement of educational interpreters in regular education environments. The task force found: (1) educational interpreters need to be recognized as members of the educational team; (2) the increasing number of students with deafness enrolled in the mainstream has caused a crisis in availability of prepared professionals; (3) many students have no interpreter or an underqualified interpreter; (4) many systems do not have supervisory staff with sufficient expertise to evaluate educational interpreters; and (5) job descriptions for educational interpreters vary greatly from one setting to another. The task force recommended the development of certification standards and the promotion of these standards to the states. Since that time, 11 states have developed and implemented standards. The problem of availability of personnel remains critical. The report discusses the roles and responsibilities of the educational interpreter, special problems in the rural environment, the use of teachers of students with deafness as interpreters, and the role of the National Clearinghouse for Professions in Special Education. (CR)

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Current Status of Educational Interpreter Certification For Students who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing

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Background

In 1985, a National Task Force on Educational Interpreting was established to examine and clarify roles and responsibilities, training and certification, working conditions, and other issues and needs concerning the involvement of educational interpreters in regular education environments (Hurwitz, 1991). This task force was made up of representatives from the following organizations:

American Society for Deaf Children

Alexander Graham Bell Association for the Deaf

Convention of American Instructors of the Deaf

Conference of Educational Administrators Serving the Deaf

Conference of Interpreter Trainers

National Association of the Deaf

Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf

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The task force report is available by writing the Rochester Institute of Technology, Campus Connections, P.O. Box 9887, Rochester, NY 14623-0887. In essence, the report found the following:

EC 307453

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- educational interpreters need to be recognized as members of the educational team;
- the increasing number of deaf students enrolled in the mainstream has caused a crisis in availability of prepared professionals;
- many students have no interpreter or an underqualified interpreter;
- many systems do not have supervisory staff with sufficient expertise to evaluate educational interpreters, and;
- job descriptions for educational interpreters vary greatly from one setting to another.

The Task Force recommended the development of certification standards and the promotion of these standards to the states. Since that time, some states have developed and implemented standards. The problem of availability of personnel remains critical.

Roles and Responsibilities of the Educational Interpreter

According to Seal (1998), the educational interpreter is responsible for the following:

a. to interpret and/or transliterate according to the specifications of the student's Individualized Education Plan (IEP);

b. to utilize planning time to meet with teachers and staff as deemed appropriate by the educational team and/or supervisor;

c. to prepare for demanding course material (teacher lectures, videotapes, tests) as necessary for successful interpreting and/or transliterating;

d. to demonstrate professionalism in all interactions with administrators, teachers, and staff, with parents and students, and with visitors or individuals unfamiliar with the

educational setting;

e. to demonstrate professionalism in all ethical areas, especially in applying the Code of Ethics to the educational setting;

f. to assist with other duties as determined appropriate by the educational team and/or supervisor; and

g. to participate in self-evaluations as determined appropriate by the supervisor. (p.23)

Educational interpreters face many challenges. Some students for whom they are interpreting are poor or non-attenders. Some interpreters have difficulty in keeping the lines clearly drawn among the simultaneous roles of interpreter/tutor/advocate. Often schools assume that the interpreter should be available to interpret in all locations and at all hours, even outside of school. Sometimes parents who have little knowledge of sign language will expect the interpreter to tutor them. Oftentimes students who have not studied or have not paid attention will blame the interpreter, stating that their own poor performance is actually a result of poor interpreting. Many times interpreters are asked to interpret material which is challenging and for which they may or may not have been given sufficient time to prepare. In addition, many students are often placed with the same interpreter year after year. This presents a particular challenge to the student/interpreter relationship. Seal (1998) presents suggestions for best practices which may assist educational interpreters in deal with these difficult situations.

Special Problems in the Rural Environment

Interpreters who work in rural environments are especially at risk because they may not have access either to a support system or a network of colleagues with whom they may share ideas. Further, rural school systems may be in a positions where they must hire the "best

available" (Yarger, 1999); this often leads to the hiring of underqualified interpreters. Yarger (1999) recommends the following actions for supporting educational interpreting in rural environments:

- provide a provisional period for mentoring;
- provide inservice training with respect for roles and responsibilities if preservice training was insufficient;
- establish a system to network with other interpreters in similar rural environments (such as an e-mail listservice);
- establish easy access to a state-wide lending library;
- establish at least minimum standards for hiring (the stick to them!);
- provide inservice in the process of collaborating with teachers, then collaborate);
- participate where possible on IEP teams (this will establish the interpreter as a professional member of the child's team); and,
- recognize the need to provide professional pay for this professional service.

Current Status of State's Standards

Approximately 11 states have standards for educational interpreters, although some who do not are in the process of developing these. For more information, contact the National Clearinghouse for Professions in Special Education at 800-641-7824 or www.special-education-careers.org.

Current Status of Educational Interpreter Training

As students who are Deaf and Hard of Hearing move into the general education arena, the need for interpreters becomes significant. According to the 20th Annual Report to the Congress on

the Implementation of IDEA, the need for interpreters is high among the field of related service personnel and includes the need for interpreters to children who are Deaf and Hard of Hearing.

The "Teacher as Interpreter" Issue

More and more, teachers of the deaf are being asked to do double duty as both teacher and interpreter. This is a particular challenge as the roles vary in very important ways. Whereas the student may be accustomed to turning to the teacher of the deaf for clarification, in the general classroom he or she must now turn to the general education teacher. This may require a period of assisting the student to transition from the teacher's role as teacher to his or her role as interpreter. Secondly, many uninformed administrators assume that a teacher of the deaf is automatically qualified to interpret. This is not necessarily so. In fact, only two states (Texas and Minnesota) have established requirements for minimum skills in sign language for teachers of the deaf. The State of Texas has six different pathways for teachers to acquire validation of their signing skills. The State of Minnesota requires its teachers to have an intermediate rating on the Sign Communication Proficiency Inteview (SCPI) (Minnesota Statue, 1992). Intermediate level is defined as:

> Able to discuss with some confidence routine social and work topics within a conversational format with some (adequate) elaboration. Good knowledge and control of everyday/basic sign language vocabulary (may have several sign misproductions), with fluency generally characterized by moderate signing pace and some inappropriate pauses/hesitations. Demonstrates some sign language grammatical features in connected discourse, but not controlled. Fairly good comprehension for a moderate-to-normal signing rate; a few repetitions and phrasing of questions may be needed. (Newell & Caccamise, 1994)

Until all states have sign language requirements for teachers of the deaf and for educational interpreters, the lines of demarcation between interpreters and teachers will remain blurred.

CEC/NCPSE's Role

The National Clearinghouse for Professions in Special Education (NCPSE) at The Council for Exceptional Children (CEC) provides resources and information for individuals seeking careers and training in working with children with disabilities, including the profession of educational interpreting. NCPSE/CEC is supportive and aware of the national critical need for quality, certified educational interpreters. The National Clearinghouse suggests the following resources which may be useful to the public.

1. The *EdiTORial* Newsletter: This newsletter is for educational interpreters and transliterators of the Registry for Interpreters for the Deaf (RID). This newsletter includes articles and information from all regions of the United States about what is happening on the subject of educational interpreters in their states. There is a small fee to receive this newsletter. For more information, contact Malina Lindell at 541-276-6992 X 146. E-mail malina_lindell@umesd.k12.or.us: www.rid.org.
2. The National Educational Interpreter Conference NEIC): This annual conference presents various resources, workshops and information for and about the educational interpreter. This conference is presented by several partners including but not limited to: Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf (RID); Postsecondary Education Programs Network (PEPNet) (CA office); Gallaudet University Regional Interpreter Training Project; Gallaudet University Regional Center. For more information about the 1999 NEIC, contact Jane Nunes at Norther Essex Community College. 978-556-4341 Voice/TTY or E-mail to NETAC@necc.mass.edu.
3. Other organizations and resources for information, grants, certification information include but are not limited to: Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf (RID), National Association for the Deaf (NAD), National Institute on Communication Disorders, The

Council on Education of the Deaf (CED).

4. Web site and web searches: The Internet holds a wealth of resources for those interested in the field of educational interpreting. Also, NCPSE has an educational interpreter resource fact sheet on the web at www.special-ed-careers.org.

5. Funding source information at the Federal level: The U.S. Department of Education/Office of Special Education (OSER) oversees information and grants for Educational Interpreter Training, Project EITP. The following contacts may be useful: Mary Ann McDermott; Project Officer, EITP 202-205-8876. Maryann_McDermott@ed.gov and Mary Lovely; Project Officer for Interpreter Training Projects (ITP). 202-205-9393. Mary_Lovely@ed.gov.

6. Book: An excellent source for guidance on interpreting issues is *Best Practices in Educational Interpreting* written by Brenda Chafin Seal and published by Allyn & Bacon, Inc. For more information, call Sign Enhancers, Inc. at 800-767-4461 or E-mail an order to sign@signenhancers.com.

7. Article: Washington Post, April 29, 199. "At Colleges, Lack of Interpreters for the Deaf, Frustration Grows for Hearing Impaired Students" by Tom Jackson.

Summary

There is at present a national crisis inavailability of skilled, credentialed educational interpreters at all ages and academic levels for deaf and hard of hearing students. This problem has several sources: the lack of interpreter training programs, the difference between public interpreting and educational interpreting, and the need for more states to have certification requirements as well as for national certification standards, and the need for salary standards. The National Clearinghouse for Professions in Special Education (NCPSE) at the Council for

Exceptional Children (CEC) understands this profession's crisis and has begun its support by developing lists of resources available and accessible to the public. It is getting the word "out" by providing resources to state administrators, principals and parents, and by working cooperatively with such organizations as the Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf, the National Association of the Deaf, and the Council on Education of the Deaf, among others. For information updates, visit the Clearinghouse's website at www.special-ed-careers.org.

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